

To: CN=Terry Oda/OU=R9/O=USEPA/C=US@EPA;CN=Gary Wolinsky/OU=R9/O=USEPA/C=US@EPA;CN=Jessica Kao/OU=R9/O=USEPA/C=US@EPA;Jennifer Wigal[]; N=Gary Wolinsky/OU=R9/O=USEPA/C=US@EPA;CN=Jessica Kao/OU=R9/O=USEPA/C=US@EPA;Jennifer Wigal[]; N=Jessica Kao/OU=R9/O=USEPA/C=US@EPA;Jennifer Wigal[]; Jennifer Wigal[]
Cc: []
Bcc: []
From: CN=Kathleen Goforth/OU=R9/O=USEPA/C=US
Sent: Wed 5/10/2000 7:30:47 PM
Subject: DO objectives; revised Sac/San Joaquin '89-'95 draft letter
[Action ltr 1989-95 DRAFT7.wpd](#)
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Terry, Gary, Jessica, Jennifer -

As you know, our draft letter for the 1989-94 amendments to the Sac/San Joaquin basin plan includes disapproval of the rearrangement of the DO objectives that resulted in removal of the general DO objectives from the Delta. The general objectives are based on percent saturation. Concentration-based objectives remain in place for some, but not all, Delta waters. I reviewed the national criteria guidance for DO yesterday to see whether those concentration-based objectives might be sufficient to protect the uses in those waters without the percent saturation objectives, and found, on the contrary, that the basin plan's DO objectives, as a whole, appear to be woefully inadequate. The criteria guidance basically rejects the percent saturation approach to setting DO criteria, and recommends, instead, concentration-based criteria expressed as 7- and 30-day means as well as single sample minimum values. The Basin Plan does not include any mean concentration values (only the percent saturation objectives are expressed as a monthly median of mean daily values), and the single sample minimum values are inadequate to protect early life stages of coldwater fishes in many water bodies. In short, the DO objectives in the Basin Plan are out of date. They were approved in 1975, and have not been updated for consistency with the criteria guidance, which was published in 1986.

To address this, I have (1) revised the disapproval item to say that the State must EITHER adopt new DO objectives for Delta waters to make them consistent with the 1986 guidance OR restore the applicability of the general (percent saturation) objectives to all Delta waters (which would not do anything to improve the Basin Plan's consistency with the guidance, but would, at least, address the antidegradation aspect of the situation until such time as the objectives are updated); and (2) I have added a recommendation (on the "Issues for the Next Triennial" attachment) that the DO objectives for all waters be updated to be consistent with the 1986 guidance. (I also moved our recommendation regarding the "unimportant fishery" exclusion from the disapproval attachment to the "Issues for the Next Triennial" attachment.) Given that the guidance recommends against the percent saturation approach, one might question the logic of suggesting that the Regional Board restore the applicability of the saturation-based general objectives to the Delta; however, since those same objectives were previously approved by EPA and currently apply to all other waters in the Sac/San Joaquin Basins, and since their removal from the Delta was inadvertent and inconsistent with the antidegradation policy, and since the development of new objectives is not likely to be something that the Regional Board would be willing/able to tackle within 90 days, I think it makes sense to allow this option as an immediate fix for the disapproval. That said, I also think it is important to simultaneously put the State on notice that we expect the DO objectives to be updated in the next triennial, just as we have put them on notice about the need to update the bacteria criteria (only in this case, we are stopping short of committing to promulgate by a certain date). Please let me know if you are comfortable with this approach.

As an alternative to disapproving the removal of the general DO objectives from the Delta, we could try asking the Regional Board to write us a letter stating that the removal of those objectives from the Delta was inadvertent, and stating that the general objectives still apply to the Delta. We could then

include an "understanding" in our letter that the general objectives still apply to the Delta, despite the explicit wording of the Basin Plan to the contrary; however, this approach might look a little flaky, since the Basin Plan, as amended, very clearly says that the general objectives only apply "[f]or surface water bodies outside the legal boundaries of the Delta". As was proposed for the REC issue in the Grassland letter, I suppose we could also reserve action on this amendment until such time as the Regional Board restores the general objectives' applicability to the Delta or adopts new DO objectives, but we might find ourselves reserving for a long time or having to fall back on a disapproval in the end, so I'm not sure that that would buy us much, and, in the meantime, we would have yet another loose end to keep track of.

Here's the latest draft of the 1989-95 letter. Changes since the last draft are highlighted in magenta. Please let me know ASAP if you have any comments on it, as I am now in the process of drafting the BE for this action, and need to know what actions we are taking in order to assess the affects on listed species. I suspect that DO objectives for aquatic life are something the Services will care about, so I especially need to know how we are going to handle that issue. If I can show that we are pro-actively and effectively dealing with both the lack of general DO objectives for the Delta and the overall inadequacy of the DO objectives basin-wide, it might head-off some concerns on their part.

One last thing: Based on a quick check with several of the other basin plan reviewers, it appears that no two basin plans have exactly the same DO objectives and that few, if any, are fully consistent with the 1986 guidance. It might be a good idea for everyone to check their basin plan's objectives against the guidance. Also, I noticed that the boilerplate language re: DO that we were originally using in the draft basin plan letters (and which, I think, is still in some of them) says that the guidance provides criteria for a range of protection levels (ranging from "no production impairment" to "severe production impairment"), which is not really accurate. The criteria were based, in part, on a study that produced such a range of values, but the final criteria were not expressed in that manner. In fact, in discussing the findings of that study, the guidance specifically says that "dissolved oxygen concentrations that risk significant loss of fishery production are not consistent with the intent of water quality criteria", so I would recommend reconsideration of the boilerplate language.

-Kathy